

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE



2012-2013

Letters About Literature

Awards Ceremony

May 3, 2013

11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Columbia, South Carolina



south carolina
STATE LIBRARY

Introductions	Dr. Curtis R. Rogers, Coordinator, South Carolina Center for the Book
Welcome	Ann Addy, Member, South Carolina State Library Foundation
Awards	<p>Each student winner will be introduced by a South Carolina Letters About Literature judge.</p> <p>Winning students will read their letter and receive their award.</p> <p>Photos will be taken when students receive awards and a group photo will be taken at the end of the program.</p>
Closing Remarks	Dr. Curtis R. Rogers

Level One

First Place	Zauria Manigault, Heyward Gibbes Middle School, Columbia
Second Place	Banks Mitchell, Atheneum/Vine & Branches Home Educators, Conway
Third Place	Naudia Humphrey, Heyward Gibbes Middle School, Columbia

Level Two

First Place	Emily Grace Cannon, McCants Middle School, Anderson
Second Place	Maggee Bolt, McCants Middle School, Anderson
Third Place	McKinley Rowland, McCants Middle School, Anderson

Level Three

First Place	Aidan Baxter-Ferguson, Spartanburg Day School, Spartanburg
Second Place	Rebecca Dupree, James F. Byrnes Freshman Academy, Duncan
Third Place	Emma Sherer, SC Virtual Charter School, Columbia

Dear Eoin Colfer,

Many of the events that Cosmo went through in your book "*Supernaturalist*" flooded my mind with the memory of the sadness I felt when two major events happened to me in my young life.

Your book brought me back to the emotions I experienced when my brother was born. On January 25, 2004 my little brother was born. At first I was excited until I found out that all the attention was going towards him. That made me furious. But, just like Ditto, Stefan, and Mona had to accept Cosmo as a family member. I grew to like my little brother and finally accepted him into my life. Just like Stefan, it only took me some days. When I read this book, those emotions swept over me once again.

Like Cosmos, I lost my acquaintance too. When we were riding on our bikes after a hard rain, the roads were slippery. As we descended the hill in our neighborhood, my friend lost control of her bike, slid and fell. I tried to help her get up, but she told me she couldn't at the moment because she was hurting too bad. So, I decided to move her bike out of the street so she wouldn't have to and then come back to help her get out of the street. I figured by the time I got back, she would have recovered from the fall and would be ready for my help. But that's when it happened. She got ran over by an oncoming car. I was devastated. That was a really depressing moment in my life. But just like Cosmo, I moved on with my life.

Sometimes when I feel down I read your book over and over again until I finally understand the feelings and thoughts of the characters. This book is a comfort to my heart and soul.

Zauria Manigault

Dear John Reynolds Gardiner,

Why did Searchlight have to die? He was so close! Why would grandfather give up on life? Who would really do that? Why would Stone Fox slap Little Willy? He was just looking at his dogs. How could Little Willy take on so much pressure? He was only ten years old. These questions bothered me as I thought about *Stone Fox*.

I read *Stone Fox* to my Dad every morning. My brother and sister kept saying, "That book is so sad!" And I just didn't see it. By the last chapter I was weeping and I saw tears rolling down my Dad's cheeks. Now I see what they were talking about.

I had mixed feelings as I finished the book. I felt happy and sad at the same time. I was proud of Little Willy because he never gave up but sad because Searchlight couldn't experience Little Willy's victory.

One theme that I related to in your book was—family comes first. Little Willy showed respect, determination, courage, responsibility, and most of all love. My Dad said that I remind him of Little Willy. That was powerful to me. I hope that I will never be in a situation like that, but if I am, I know that I will do the right thing.

In the end, your book taught me that even as a young boy I can do anything I set my mind to. Thank you for that life lesson.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Banks Mitchell". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Banks" and "Mitchell" being capitalized and prominent.

Banks Mitchell, Grade 4

Dear Lesley Choyce,

I really didn't know how it felt to be pressured until I read "*Running the Risk*." Jenny's character just made me angry. I wanted stop reading, but something told me to keep reading on.

"*Running the Risk*" has made me realize that growing up too fast can cause situations in your life that you are not ready to handle. Sean's character has shown me that when you attempt to grow up too fast, grown-up types of circumstances and consequences could happen. I have done stupid things just like Sean and it seemed that consequences just came out the ordinary, when I least expected it.

In the book, Jenny told Sean it was okay to smoke and drink as long as he didn't get caught while doing it. When I heard that, I was as furious as a seal on a flaming day. I couldn't figure out why Sean believed her. I thought it was crazy. I remember when some friends of mine approached me recently and asked me to take a smoke. At first I said sure. But, at that point, I thought of the D.A.R.E. session that taught me that smoking could cause damage to my lungs. I immediately changed my mind about taking that smoke. Maybe if Sean had attended some of those D.A.R.E sessions with me, he wouldn't have given in to Jenny's pressure.

At first I thought the book was so gimpy, but I kept reading and when I read that the two gunmen walked in to rob Burger Heaven, I felt as if I was pulled into a portal and entering the very pages of the book. Last year, when I was in the fifth grade, my mother and I were in the bank. Four men walked in and we were told to put our hands up and don't move. I was thinking of a way to help. I saw the police emergency button and thought about going over to press it. After reading the book, I realized that going over to press that button may have been a stupid thing to do. One of those men at the bank could have shot and killed me for trying to stop them just like one of the gunmen did to the little boy that tried to run out of the door at Burger Heaven.

Reading your book has made me confident that I don't want to grow up too fast or get caught up into grown-up activities. Jenny chose to smoke, skip school, and dress in a way that almost got her raped. Jenny's choices had her on a downhill road spiraling towards disaster. I am not one of those young people that have to "find out the hard way" by making my own mistakes. I am smart enough to learn from the many mistakes Jenny made in the book. Your book enlightened me about bad decisions and saved me a lot of pain and suffering by presenting the results of making choices to grow up before your time.

Naudia Humphrey

Dear Harper Lee,

In the world, there are many different stories that cause a feeling inside of you that changes your perspective on life. Your book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* changed me forever. Everything about your novel made me feel like a different person. Your novel made me feel pain, joy, guilt, and anger. It caused a spark in me, and everyone knows a spark eventually turns into a huge wild fire.

When my English teacher told us we were going to read your book, my friends and I laughed and thought it was going to be the most boring book in the whole world. I remember saying that it was going to be a waste of time. I planned on reading Spark Notes, but my mother told me it was mandatory to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

As soon as I picked up your book, I instantly fell in love. When I started reading the first few chapters, your words made me melt inside. Your words just flowed together like a waterfall gracefully falling into a sparkling pond. I instantly took back my words on how stupid *To Kill a Mockingbird* was going to be.

The main character, Jean Louise Finch, or Scout Finch, reminded me much of myself when I was six, caring, loving, curious and judgmental. After into half of the book, I became Scout Finch. I went on their crazy adventures to find Boo Radley with them. I have never felt so much suspense just by reading words.

Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* was now my way to pass time. I took it in the car with me, I took when I went to the doctor's office, I even took it to dance class if I was early. I was so engrossed in the story line. The biggest way the book changed me was to never be racist. I wasn't exactly racist, but I would never be best friends with an African American. I asked myself an important question as soon as Tom Robinson was introduced into the book, "Would I trust Tom?" A strange feeling inside of me told me the brutal truth-- *no*. I would have never trusted a black man who was accused of raping a woman.

As the book went on, I became even more attached to it. When the trial came, I was on the edge of my seat to see if Tom would be free. When they said he was guilty, I was infuriated! Why would they accuse an innocent man just because he was black? When Tom was killed, I had a feeling in the pit of my stomach that made me want to cry, and throw up. I was disgusted. Then, a change of heart came. Right then and there. Don't judge others by what other people say. Tom raping Mayella Ewell was all just a lie. Also Boo Radley being a crazy man who killed people was also a lie. I also learned not to judge people by the color of their skin.

Scout and I learned these important lessons. Tom and Boo were good people and they saved Jem and Scout life physically and mentally. I look at things differently now. I am a more understanding person. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is definitely a book I will pass on to my children. If I saw you today and had the incredible honor of speaking to you, all I would say is thank you for changing my life.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Emily Grace Cannon

Dear Suzanne Collins,

Your novel the Hunger Games has truly changed me. I never knew how lucky I was until I read this book. It changed me because I didn't appreciate all that I have, and this book has made everything in my life more meaningful. Having something as simple as food or as great as family has made me thankful after I read this.

After reading this novel and learning how difficult life was in Panem made an impact on me. All of the families in district twelve suffer and work hard for a small portion of food. I have thought about how wasteful I am with food and how some people sometimes do not have any food at all. I have three meals a day or more and I still complain, but it never occurred to me how well other people are fed. Children have been sent to fight to the death in this novel and I worry whether or not we have Goldfish in the cabinet. I couldn't imagine how rough it must be to live like the people in this book.

Another thing I have found to be more meaningful is family. Children ages 12-18 are taken from their families and I don't worry enough about mine. They have to leave their family to go fight and might not ever see them again. I would never be able to leave my family with the thought that I may lose them forever. Your book has made me rethink all of the unkind and rude things I have done to my family. You never know anymore when the last time you will see the ones you love most.

Overall, your book has led me to appreciate all I have, whether it is as simple as food or as major as family. I cherish all that I have now and hope life never turn out like it did in Panem. I have grown to care more the others and worry about their sake. I have learned a great life lesson from this story and I will never forget it.

Sincerely,

Maggee B. Bolt

Dear June Rae Wood,

Last year I read your book, *Man Who Loved Clowns*. It really changed my perspective on the way I see mentally challenged people. I used to think that they were just a lag to society but because of your book I now see them in a much brighter light.

Your book showed me that people who are mentally challenged are smart people who have personalities and feelings. You showed me this through your character, Punky. I remember how he loved his family and how he loved clowns of course. I also liked the way he made friends in the book like with the people he worked with. I began to see him as a person who I would like to have as a friend and not a person who was just mentally challenged.

While I was reading this book someone would be mean to Punky and it would make me sad. It made me realize that they were insensitive or that they really did not know him. I started thinking that if I had met Punky on the street I may have done that too. Some people would just stop and stare and I realized I would also be one to stare. The way you wrote the book made it easy for me to relate to Punky and understand his situation.

Thank you for writing this book. I realize that Punky now can be anyone I meet on the street and that I don't always know what is going on in their life. It made me want to understand people better and especially people who may be different.

Sincerely,

McKinley Rowland

Dear L.A. Meyer,

This isn't a fan letter. No, don't take that wrong - I love the *Bloody Jack* series. If I could just gush about how awesome your books are and ask for your autograph and tell you I'm your number one fan, I definitely would, but this contest I'm entering requires that I not write you a fan letter. I'm supposed to tell you how your writing changed me somehow. So here goes.

You see, my grandparents and I weren't very close. They live in Idaho and I see them maybe once or twice every few years, and on top of that, at the time we just didn't get along. They're conservative, fifties-era, tradition-family-value types, whereas I am not those things. These were the people who consistently sent me underwear each year for Christmas, even though if you knew me, Mr. Meyer, you would know that I am the kind of person who abhors the idea of getting underwear as a gift. However, despite these obvious rifts, the summer of seventh grade I was shipped off to their isolated cabin in the woods for a trial of three weeks, so I could 'get to know them'. The first week I was absolutely wretched; I was horribly homesick and less than a delight to be around because of it. I snapped and grumbled, started sobbing at the drop of a hat, slipped into uncalled for depressions where I did and said nothing. You have to understand, I was still kind of a little kid, and I'd never been away from home before. Nevertheless, I was the worst guest imaginable and my grandparents were becoming very frustrated with me. So, in a last act of desperation to reach me, my grandpa planned to take me out for a fishing trip and brought home an audiobook to listen to in the car ride there. It was *Bloody Jack*. Here's where you come in.

That car ride was the first time I genuinely felt like my grandparents and I were related. We laughed, gasped, crept to the edge of our seats, all in unison. When Jacky asked Mrs. Roundtree about 'woman problems', my grandma and I exchanged a knowing look. My grandpa's face in the rearview mirror when Jacky killed that guy to protect Jaimy was so shocked that I couldn't help but laugh, even though Benjy was dead and that kind of 'harshed my buzz', if that's what the kids are saying these days. We listened almost all the way through; I think my grandpa might've taken the long, *long* way to the lake, and for some reason that notion always makes me feel so warm. Always.

Your book changed things between my grandparents and I, Mr. Meyer. Suddenly we had something to talk about - when was the new *Jacky Faber* coming out? What country is Jacky going to revolutionize this time? Which new beau is going to fall madly in love with her and then be crushed by her (albeit wavering) devotion to Jaimy? That Christmas Grandma didn't send me that six-pack of undies I had learned to dread; she sent me the box set with the first five books and explained that she had bought them for herself too. We swapped e-mails detailing our personal reviews as we slowly inched our way through the series. Gradually, non-Jacky things would slip into our conversation - what was going on there, what was going on here, normal stuff. But that's just it. We started talking normally, like relatives might. And suddenly they *were* family. I told them about high school and my prom dress and my grades, and found myself just writing to them because it felt like I was talking to a friend. I still write to them today. No offense, but sometimes I don't even mention Jacky (*sometimes*).

Now, I could mention the other ways Jacky Faber changed me. Like how she taught me that being a girl didn't mean I was useless, or that being young didn't mean I couldn't do what I felt was right no matter right. Or how important it is to make the best of a situation even if it thoroughly sucks (compared to Jacky's being trapped on a slave ship more than once, my C- in math seems much less tragic). But you see, I think Jacky would agree (not having a family herself) that keeping the bond between you and your kin is - and I so hate to use this word, because it's in my opinion the sappiest one in the dictionary - precious. And that's why this normal, friendly bridge that I have between my grandparents and I is so important to me, more important than any personal value. So, thank you, L.A. Meyer, for helping me connect with people I used to think were total dweebs. And by the way, just because I can't help myself - I loved the *Bloody Jack* books. Can I have your autograph?

Your pal,
Aidan

Dear Patricia McCormick,

Your book Cut affected me on a deeper level than most books I have read. The main character Callie reminds me a lot of myself. It may seem like I'm fine on the outside, but I used to have a different way of dealing with problems. After reading Cut, I felt terrible about what I was doing to myself and took steps to put a halt to such destructive behavior. I can proudly say your book helped me stop cutting myself and made me take a step back in order to more closely evaluate my life. I haven't cut myself for about a month now after a recent but brief relapse. Before that, I had been clean for almost a year.

With every page I turned, my scars began to tingle. I've known others who have chosen to take the same path I once chose. To see someone else inflicting pain upon their selves made my heart ache. I don't want anyone to go through the pain and suffering I put myself through. As I became attached to Callie, I felt every one of her triumphs was a triumph of my own. I began to grow along with the character, and before I knew it I had come out of my shell. Today, I feel the character of Amanda deeply resonates with me, because I can proudly show off my scars, seeing as they are only that... scars, not cuts. No matter how I am judged for the choices I have made in the past, I know everything I've gone through has made me who I am today.

I am stronger and I have found so many different ways to vent and express emotion. I have taken up writing as an outlet, thanks to you. One day I hope a work of my own will inspire and maybe even save someone the way your book saved me. Also, I strive to start a small organization to help those who struggle with self harm, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Even when no one is there for them, I want to be the one person they can come to. Your book set off a chain reaction in my life and I have gone from being a depressed, suicidal cutter, to a confident, bubbly, energetic person dedicated to helping others.

Thank you, Patricia.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Kathryn Dupree

Dear Mr. Lewis:

"Come further up, come further in!" That call somehow spoke to some deep part of me, causing me to break down in tears of joy on that cold, wet autumn day as I read the final book in your series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

For years before I read that book, I had been searching for something. It started when I was only five years old – this *feeling* that I couldn't explain to anyone. I didn't even try to tell anyone about it – it was so bizarre.

I would get these flashes of – well, not of *pain*, exactly, but flashes, at the strangest moments. I would just be looking at something – a rock or a meadow or a tree – and suddenly, I would feel a *longing* in the deepest part of my soul – like I needed to go somewhere or see something. Like I'd seen it before and I needed to go on a journey to see it again.

When I was very little, I used to think I needed something to eat when I got these flashes. So I'd rush into the kitchen and stuff myself with food – but the aftershock of the flash wouldn't go away. I couldn't figure out what it was that was causing me to have these odd stirrings of my being.

Then I read *The Chronicles of Narnia* and suddenly, the flash was stronger than ever. I could feel the words jumping off the page and piercing my heart. They impacted me so fiercely that I would often stagger back after reading a line or page. I eagerly consumed book after book until I reached the final one – *The Last Battle*.

I remember reading *The Last Battle* out in our garden, on a little vine that served as a swing. It was pouring rain, but I pulled the brim of my hat down over my face to keep my glasses from becoming watery and hunched over my book so that my back took on the rain instead of the book.

When I got to the part where Jewel and the Eagle are saying, *"Come further up! Come further in!"* I suddenly got the flash again – only stronger, wilder, richer than ever. It was so strong that I felt tears spring to my eyes and roll down my cheeks.

I finished the book in a haze of tears, finally breaking down in gut-wrenching sobs at the end. It

was the Flash incarnated! I had to know more about this author that had impacted me so much, so I looked you up and got some biographies off of my family's extensive bookshelves.

I read your biography and couldn't believe what I found. At long last, here was someone who not only comprehended those deep feelings of longing, but who also managed to express them in words.

I began to read more and more of your writings, hungrily devouring anything by you – or anything you recommended. I needed to feel more of this feeling – this feeling that you called “Northernness.” “Northernness.” I love the sound of that word. It's magical. Like your books.

Little by little, through reading your writings, I began to be able to express the feeling in my own words. You empowered me to write things that I had never understood before. Through your tutelage – the tutelage you didn't know you were giving me – I was enabled to open a door I never even knew was there – a door that meant freedom, magic, and love.

Some people say the *Narnia* series is meant for kids. I disagree. I think anybody of any age can connect to the plot, the characters – even the setting. Something about it is timeless – something about it speaks to a certain something instilled in each of us.

How do I know this, you ask? Because after I started reading the *Narnia* series, I realised that I wasn't the only one. I wasn't the only one who experienced Northernness, or the Flash. People all around me are experiencing it every day. And your books, Mr. Lewis, are books that can help people understand it better.

I guess I haven't really said in this letter how you changed my worldview. But I think that's because you shaped my worldview.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Sherer

2012-2013 Judges

Melanie Barton *Executive Director,
South Carolina Education Oversight Committee*

Curtis Derrick *Faculty, English & Humanities,
Midlands Technical College*

Jenny Dilworth *Children's Librarian
Richland Library*

Dr. Patricia E. Feehan *Associate Professor
USC School of Library & Information Science*

Joyce Hansen *Children's Author*

Jonathan Haupt *Director,
The University of South Carolina Press*

Dr. Dianne Johnson *Professor,
USC School of English Language & Literature*

Denise R. Lyons *Director of Library Development,
South Carolina State Library*

T.J .Wallace *Grants and Program Officer,
The Humanities Council^{SC}*

About ReadSC.org

The South Carolina Center for the Book

The South Carolina Center for the Book is the South Carolina Affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book and is a cooperative project of the South Carolina State Library, the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science and the Humanities Council^{SC}. The Center is located at 1500 Senate, Columbia, SC.

The South Carolina Center for the Book celebrates South Carolina's rich literary heritage and brings public attention to the importance of books, writers and reading.

The South Carolina Center for the Book envisions a state where there is a community focus on the joy and value of reading.



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